

H O M E E A L T H Y   O U T L O O K   B L O G

# Healthy Outlook Blog

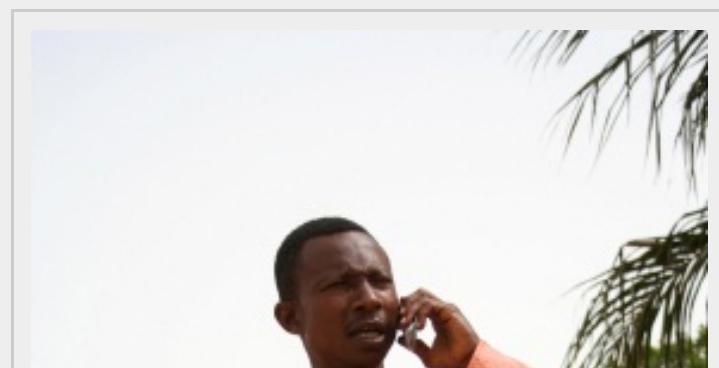
## Old Cell Phones Save Lives in Africa

By Karen Berger | Posted November 26 2010

Africa, cell phones, developed world, Everyday Health, Global Health, innovation, Inspiration, international healthcare, Lifestyle, Motivation

*What use is an old cell phone? If you donate it to Frontline:SMS Medic, it could save a life.*

Frontline SMS: Medic is a not-for-profit organization founded by Stanford University students. Their goal: to use appropriate, innovative technologies to advance health care in the developing world.



In the last 10 years, cell phones, and cell phone service, have exploded all over Africa. Even remote areas such as the deserts of Darfur can have better cell reception than some rural areas in the United States. What if this technology could be



### A B O U T   O U R   B L O G

Our blog is a collection of thoughts and stories that serve as inspiration for what healthymagination is—a shared commitment to creating better health for more people. It's written by the people behind healthymagination, as well as members of our advisory board and guest contributors from around the web.

### Y O U   M I G H T   L I K E



#### Using Math to Predict Best Treatment for Acetaminophen Overdose

Each year, 56,000 Americans end up in emergency rooms due to acetaminophen overdoses. However, there are effective treatments for acetaminophen overdoses, which cause toxic hepatitis. The problem is deciding—very quickly—which



AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis, and cholera. In an emergency, without access information or medical advice, sometimes, the only thing the workers could do was carry a stretcher as fast as they could walk. Lay nurses traveled on foot or bicycle from village to village, hauling pounds of paper medical records with them.

The students saw a simple solution: Given that cell phone service was becoming ubiquitous even in remote areas, could inexpensive cell phones and text messaging link community health workers and trained medical professionals stationed elsewhere?

Back at Stanford, the students met with Ken Banks, the founder of [FrontlineSMS](#), a free mobile communications organization for nonprofits. They returned to Africa with some Frontline software, a used laptop, and 100 donated phones. The open-source software basically turns the computers into cell phones that can send and receive messages from other cell phones.

used to dispense medical care?

That's the question Josh Nesbit, co-founder and executive director of Frontline SMS:Medic, and fellow Stanford University students asked when they were doing volunteer work in Malawi in 2007. They saw the effectiveness of using trained community workers who act as lay nurses and provide some basic primary care. But they also saw that these health workers had to cope with complex and life-threatening emergencies, caused by such diseases as

treatment is best in each case.



### Can Even Mild Thyroid Problems Cause Depression?

If you've been feeling blue for a while, it's a good idea to talk to your doctor. Doctors usually evaluate a patient's overall health before recommending psychological or psychiatric treatments. One area to consider is your thyroid.



### Building an Electronic Thinking Cap

We've looked for years at ways to stretch our thinking beyond everyday boundaries by putting on the proverbial "thinking cap." Remarkably, the once far-fetched fantasy is rapidly moving out of the lab and into our lives.

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## O U R A U T H O R S

"We implemented a pilot project in 2008, the media picked up the story, and all of a sudden, I was spending 10 hours a day talking to Ministries of Health and NGOs from my dorm room," Nesbit recalls.

Following the success of the pilot program, Frontline SMS:Medic was founded in early 2009. Nesbit describes the organization's mission as replicating proven models, but supporting them with new open source tools. Its success in Malawi has included partnering with the [Clinton Health Access Initiative](#) in the successful implementation of a program called [Prevention of Mother to Child HIV-Transmission](#) (or PMTCT). New projects include expanding the program to other countries; Frontline SMS:Medic is currently establishing programs in Bangladesh, Kenya, and Uganda as well as continuing its work in Malawi.

According to Nesbit, old cell phones are collected by Hope Phones, and then sent to [The Wireless Source](#), a recycling partner that values the handsets and gives equivalent funding back to the project. The money is used to buy new, appropriate handsets in local markets. (That way, an old, but still valuable cell phone can be turned into 5 or 10 less expensive but functional handsets.)

## CONNECT THE DOTS

To donate a cell phone, or a collection of cell phones, to [FrontlineSMS:Medic](#), contact [Hope Phones](#).



**DISQUS**



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